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TWO ROCKFORD MEN INDICTED ON FEDERAL GUN CHARGES

ROCKFORD -- PATRICK J. FITZGERALD, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; ANDREW L. TRAVER, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, & Explosives; PAUL A. LOGLI, Winnebago County State's Attorney; and STEVEN PUGH, Chief of the Rockford Police Department, today made the following announcement:

A federal grand jury in Rockford today indicted **ARTURO VILLALVAZO**, 26 (DOB: 03/16/1978), formerly of Rockford, and **DENARDO BETHANY**, 28 (DOB: 05/17/1976), of 1111 South Independence Avenue, Rockford, Illinois, on charges of being a felon in possession of a firearm. Villalvazo and Bethany were each charged with one count of possessing a Glock .40 caliber pistol. Bethany was also charged with one count of aiding and abetting Villalvazo in connection with Villalvazo's possession of a firearm.

Villalvazo was arrested on May 4, 2004, by the Rockford Police Department and is currently in state custody on an unrelated charge. Bethany is scheduled to appear before United States Magistrate Judge P. Michael Mahoney on Monday, November 29, 2004.

If convicted of the charges, each defendant faces possible maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. If convicted, the actual sentence of each defendant will be determined by a United States District Court Judge, guided by the United States Sentencing Guidelines.

First charged by the Winnebago County States Attorney's Office under state law, each defendant was transferred to federal court where he was charged under tough federal firearms laws as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods program. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an intensive, cooperative effort between local, state, and federal law enforcement to attack gun crimes. The cornerstone of the program is that every state defendant with a gun will be reviewed for possible federal prosecution in order to obtain the harshest penalties for the worst offenders. Additional information about Project Safe Neighborhoods may be found at www.psn.gov.

The case was investigated by the Rockford Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, & Explosives, and the Rockford Police Department. The case will be prosecuted in federal court by Assistant United States Attorney Joseph D. Pedersen.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. Each defendant is entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving each defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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